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NOTES ON SOME GERMAN TRANSLATIONS OF SCANDINAVIAN AUTHORS

Nothing shows more clearly to what an extent Goethe's ideal of a world-literature has been realized in Germany than does the liberal reception she has always accorded to Scandinavian authors. Here we find a complete incorporation on the basis of old blood-relationship; not an influence of technique or motives in the case of individual writers but rather an inner assimilation of northern ideas and characters in the life of the people as a whole. It is, for instance, quite natural for German children to grow up with the heroic songs of the Edda. Scandinavian mythology, the stories of the Volsunga-sagas are as dear to them as the stories of Dietrich von Bern—which in their turn were largely preserved in the Thidreks-saga. And it is still an open question, whether Hebbel's Nibelungen-Trilogy with its German setting or Wagner's Tetralogy with its Scandinavian garb will definitely occupy the favored place in the nation's heart.—Of Holberg's comedies which influenced the German drama at Gottsched's times so much, at least one: *Der politische Kannengiesser* is still read, if not acted. It is No. 198 in Reclam's *Universal-bibliothek*. And there are strong indications of a Holberg revival inasmuch as Georg Müller in München is publishing a complete Holberg edition, the first volume of which has recently appeared. A selection was published by the *Bibliographische Institut*, Leipzig, years ago.

Bellman was for a long time considered untranslatable. There was an unsuccessful attempt by A. von Winterfeld in 1856; another by Willatzen in 1892. In 1909 suddenly came two new translations at almost the same time. The one: *Fredman' Episteln* by Felix Niedner is the work of a philologist and enthusiast, as accurate and faithful to the original as possible, even in the quaint make-up of the book. The other: *Bellman-Brevier* is a selection by the well-known poet, Hanns von Gumppenberg, who proceeded as a congenial fellow-artist, rendering the Anacreontics of the eighteenth century in the tone of our own days. Niedner's is an excellent translation (Diederichs, Jena, publ.); Gumppenberg's (A. Langen, München, publ.) is a modern re-creation. From the latter author we have also a *Schwedische Anthologie* (1903).

Oehlenschlaeger's intimate relations to Germany need only be mentioned here; cf. Vol. II, 1 of this Journal.—Andersen's *Fairy Tales* and Tegnér's *Frithjofs-Saga* are as popular in Germany as e. g. Grimm's *Märchen* or *Hermann und Dorothea*. The spirit of the extreme North has recently been revealed by the fine three-volume work of Arthur Bonus: *Isländer-Buch* (G. D. W. Callwey, München, publ.) of which a one-volume extract was made for juvenile readers.

As regards modern literature the border-line between Scandinavia and Germany seems to be abolished. Björnson first came over at the end of the fifties with his peasant-stories, then again in 1875, 1879, and 1883 with the plays *Fallissement*, *Das neue System*, and *Ein Handschuh*. *Über unsere Kraft*, both parts, was staged in 1900 creating a most profound impression all over Germany.

In the field of criticism Georg Brandes has been a vital force in Germany ever since the early seventies. His *Hauptströmungen* began to appear in 1872; from 1882 on the work was published as a "German Original-Edition". Since 1902 there has been a complete German "Original-Ausgabe" of all of Brandes's works in 20 volumes. Brandes did not originate but he stimulated in a very high degree the modern German "Science of Literature" with its tendency toward including the political, social, economic, and ethnographic relations, with its emphasis on psychological analysis and on the comparative study of various literatures.

As a critic as well as a creative author, Ola Hansson may be mentioned after Brandes. He was one of the foremost fighters for the new realism on German soil where he has been living since 1889. (Two other Scandinavians, Adolf Paul and K. Gjellerup, have likewise become German writers).

In the eighties Henrik Ibsen, with Zola and Tolstoy, was the dominating figure in the struggles of Jüngst-Deutschland. Except for Friedrich Hebbel's partial influence on Ibsen, the history of the modern German drama begins in 1878 with the simultaneous performance of *Pillars of Society* in four different theaters in Berlin. That Ibsen's mother was a German lady was not generally known. That Ibsen himself lived many years in Germany, writing there a number of his masterpieces, was but the outer manifestation of spiritual kinship. Even without such personal contact Ibsen, like Shakespeare before him, would have become a German Classic. Nowhere, outside his native country, has Ibsen been more fully

understood, more ardently admired, more deeply loved than in Germany; nor were his plays given more elaborate, congenial, and artistically perfect performances than by Otto Brahm in Berlin. If the ability to appreciate Ibsen is a criterion of culture, how do American and English audiences compare with the "Huns" in Berlin, Dresden, and München?—It was still under the supervision of the aged poet himself that the monumental German edition of his complete works was started. This edition, now ranking in importance with Schlegel-Tieck's Shakespeare, is the fruit of the coöperation of the Dane Georg Brandes and the Germans Julius Elias and Paul Schlenther (published by S. Fischer, Berlin).

Ibsen is joined, in the eighties, by Jonas Lie, Holger Drachmann, Alexander Kielland, Amalie Skram, Arne Garborg (*Mannsleute* 1886, *Müde Seelen* 1890, *Bei Mama* 1891), and J. P. Jacobsen (*Frau Marie Grubbe*: 3 German editions between 1876 and 1882; *Niels Lyhne*; 2 German editions between 1882 and 1885). So strong was, at that time, the prestige of everything Scandinavian that two of the most prominent German literary revolutionists, Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf chose the pseudonym "Bjarne Holmsen" for their joint work *Papa Hamlet*, a collection of clever prose-sketches, fearing that an ordinary German name would not attract any attention!—

August Strindberg comes to the front for the first time between 1889 and 1890, when his *Fräulein Julie* supports the cause of extreme naturalism. Other Scandinavian writers whose works have been translated into German are Verner von Heidenstam, Per Hallström, Knut Hamsun, Hermann Bang, Ellen Key, Karen Michaelis, Selma Lagerlöf, Martin Andersen-Nexö, Gustav Wied, Aage Made-lung, Gustav af Geijerstam. The selected bibliography of *Der literarische Ratgeber* (published by the German Dürer-Society through Callwey in München), contains sixty Scandinavian names, besides the Edda and other collections, and besides numerous books of criticism, etc., on Scandinavian Literature.

An author becomes a *classic* in the popular sense of the word as soon as there is a uniform standard edition of his complete or selected works. Such comprehensive editions of Scandinavian authors in the German language are now: Andersen and Kierkegaard (publ. Diederichs, Jena); Kielland (G. Merseburger, Leipzig, who also has a *Nordische Bibliothek* appearing serially); Jacobsen

(Insel-Verlag, Leipzig); Georg Brandes (A. Langen, München); Björnson, Ibsen, Geijerstam, Lagerlöf, and Peter Nansen (S. Fischer, Berlin).

The latest enterprise on a large scale is the complete German edition of August Strindberg, published by the well-known house of Georg Müller in München: *Strindbergs Werke, Deutsche Gesamtausgabe unter Mitwirkung von Emil Schering als Übersetzer vom Dichter selbst veranstaltet*. As to Germany, we see, Strindberg did not have to die in order to be appreciated as was the case with America and England where the poet's name is just beginning to be mentioned. Ever since about 1890 he had held a place of honor in German letters, and since about 1900 he was recognized as Sweden's literary "Great Power". It reflects very favorably upon German criticism in general that the approach to Strindberg was found in spite of the fact that the translation of his works did not come up to the standard of the Germanized Ibsen. And with due consideration to certain hostilities and misunderstandings on the part of ultraconservative critics it must be said that the greatness of the Strindberg phenomenon as such was never seriously disputed. Nor did the leading critics ever cling to any special phase in the poet's work or in the man's life. The temptation was indeed great to claim the author of *Fräulein Julie*, *Der Vater*, *Das Band* for the camp of the naturalists, or to identify the admirer of Nietzsche and author of *Am offenen Meer* with the philosophy of the superman. But modern German criticism is too liberal for such onesidedness. It accepted all contradictions and all discords, it tried to understand the volcanic impulsiveness and irresponsibility of the poet's soul; the pessimism and optimism, the materialism and romantic mysticism of the philosopher's thought. The evolution of Strindberg as a man, as a poet, and as a thinker was and still is the most fascinating study for German literary criticism. It is possible that the equally difficult problem called *Nietzsche*, or to mention an earlier example: Heine, helped the Germans to understand Strindberg. Foremost among German Strindberg critics are Maximilian Harden and Hermann Esswein. The penetrating "psychological attempt" of the latter (published in 1907 by R. Piper & Co., München) served as a basis for the more comprehensive work of the same author which appears within the scope of the large Strindberg edition.

As regards this edition itself the plan is as follows: there will be 42 volumes (of which 30 have so far appeared) in six divisions, the order within each group being chronological. The first division contains 14 volumes of plays, the second 5 volumes of novels; the third (9 vols.) includes, with the "modern" and "historical" novelettes, the fairy tales, fables, and poems in prose; the fourth (5 vols.) contains the autobiographical works; the fifth, one volume of poems; the sixth (8 vols.): Science, i. e., *Among French Peasants*, *Antibarbarus*, *Dramaturgy*, etc., the three *Blue books*, and finally a volume of selections entitled *Buch der Liebe*.—The exterior is worthy of its content: octavo size, clear Roman type, good paper; only the color of the cover, a rather loud yellow, might be objected to.

The translation of Mr. Schering is, in spite of Strindberg's personal coöperation, not quite what it could be. It is good and correct, but not always sufficiently idiomatic. Especially in the plays there is noticeable a certain stiffness and awkwardness in the choice of words and in the sequence of tenses that conceals some of the fine points of the dialog. The deficiencies, however, are not serious enough to detract much from the undertaking as a whole. Both publisher and translator may well be proud of what they have already achieved. They would not be Germans, if they did not try their very best to bring the work, with every new edition, nearer to its possible perfection. And how far superior are all of these German translations to the majority of English or American translations! The German translator is bound to live up, as best he can, to the standard of those ideal Germanizations of Classical or Modern authors like Voss's Homer and Schlegel-Tieck's Shakespeare. He must be accurate, scientifically exact in the first place; he must be able, in the second place, to enter completely into the spirit of the original. Woe to the amateur translator who does not combine the ideals of exactness and genuineness in his work! Criticism would crush him and half a dozen better translations would immediately drive the faulty one from the market. So high is the standard, so watchful and inexorable is criticism in the case of important writers, that translations already existing are constantly being revised. Schlegel-Tieck's *Shakespeare* has undergone numerous revisions under the auspices of the German Shakespeare Society, and yet Dr. Gundolf has recently given the Germans a

“new” Shakespeare, in the language of Modern Germany. And the German version of Ibsen is so unusually perfect for the reason that the editors have spared no trouble in comparing the various available renderings with one another and with the original, constantly revising their own finally adopted version until the translation was indeed a *German Ibsen*. In a similar manner there will be created a *German Strindberg* before long.

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